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What's the Point? : All-Women Schools in Literature and Film

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By

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Chapter 1

Introduction:

The Grier School for Girls and Fictional School Stories

In Western society, education is a mandatory part of growing up. Some children like it, and some children hate it, but many can agree there is something mythical about stories of private schools. The *Harry Potter* franchise is the perfect example of this mystification. Taking place in a boarding school, there are plenty more opportunities for fun compared to non-boarding schools. The school, Hogwarts, provides a literally magical experience for students.

I attended an all-girls boarding school, and I anticipated something just as magical. Though my time at the Grier School for Girls in Birmingham, Pennsylvania, was one of the best experiences of my entire life, there was no magic to be heard of. I chased this opportunity for a better education, and not one in wizardry. Grier, a private institution, receives more funding than my public high school and is constantly adding new classes and extracurricular activities. The school also emphasizes the arts, where my public school was considering defunding the arts while I was a student there. Additionally, my education at Grier was filled with exposure to other cultures, as my peers, affectionately called "Grier girls," were from all over the world. Many are economically advantaged, considering tuition to Grier is close to $60,000, not including funding for extracurriculars. However, scholarships and financial aid are readily available. My two best friends and I received full scholarships. I regularly say going to school at Grier was one of the best decisions I have made in my entire life. I was surrounded by feminist culture from my first day of high school, and I had the opportunity to mix with girls from a multitude of backgrounds and cultures in a predominately homogenous Central Pennsylvania.

Having had such an amazing experience at boarding school, I naturally wanted to find other pieces of media that reflected my own experience. I first turned to movies that were set in all-girls boarding school. I found *Wild Child* (2008) which follows Poppy Moore (Emma Roberts), a rich girl from Malibu, first. She attends an English boarding school her mother also

graduated from. My experience shares no similarities with that plotline, especially not the romantic interest Poppy has: her headmistress's son, Freddie (Alex Pettyfer). As I found more films, I began to understand that fictional all-girls schools are never revered for the educations they offer. In fact, in most cases, classrooms in these movies only serve as a setting for male teachers to sexually prey on his students, like in the films *All I Wanna Do* (1998) and *Tanner Hall* (2009). Fictionalized worlds serve real viewers who will infer how unimportant the classroom scenes are, and how vulnerable the girls become in these settings. My expectations for these films were incredibly high, thinking that they would encompass some positive representation of women or the school story, but, evidently, they did not.

The works that I analyze in this paper include two novels and three films. The novels are *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* by Muriel Spark and *The Group* by Mary McCarthy. The films *All I Wanna Do* and *Tanner Hall* are analyzed in the conclusion of this work, and *Dead Poets Society* (1989) is analyzed in tandem with *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie. The Group* follows the lives of eight best friends who comprise the "Group" after they graduate from Vassar College in 1933. Mary McCarthy published this book in 1954. They are thrust into adulthood and must figure out what it means to be a woman in their time. The purposes of their educations are not straightforward which I believe parallels the pre-World War II social climate in which this novel is set. I believe the novel itself is pro-school and pro-education even if some women in the Group do not have careers after college as a twenty-first-century reader might expect.

Set in the 1930s and published in 1969, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* follows the life of young girls at the Marcia Blaine School in Edinburgh, Scotland, and their interactions with their teacher, Miss Jean Brodie. This work largely focuses on Miss Brodie's quirks rather than the educational outcomes of her students who are known as the "Brodie set." Miss Brodie is, in fact,

an awful teacher and mentor to her students. Her lessons are completely opinion-based and her fascist beliefs infiltrate her classroom to deeply influence her relationship with her students. She also inappropriately introduces her girls to sex as she is simultaneously being introduced to it. By the end of the novel, one of the Brodie set betrays her and gets her fired from Marcia Blaine. I chose to analyze the film *Dead Poets Society* (1989) along with *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* because of the teacher-centric plots in each. *Dead Poets* takes place at a prestigious all-boys boarding school in America, during the 1950s, which deviates from my all-women's school focus. However, I found it to be a positive example of a teacher-centric film, where *Brodie* is a negative example. Mr. Keating (Robin Williams) is the teacher in *Dead Poets,* and he teaches with such passion that his students are inspired to start acting and studying poetry outside of class. Though Mr. Keating is the film's protagonist, the plot does not rest on him like it rests on Miss Brodie in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. He is betrayed in the end of the movie after one of his students commits suicide, but the film does not suggest that Mr. Keating is at fault.

In my conclusion, I will touch upon several other representations of all-girls schools in the media. *All I Wanna Do* and *Tanner Hall* are two examples of films showing poor representations of all-girls boarding schools. *All I Wanna Do* is set in the 1960s, and the main conflict comes from the school board considering transitioning the school from a single-sex to a coeducational institution. *Tanner Hall* roughly takes place in the 2010s in a New England boarding school. The plot follows the forbidden romantic relationship between the main character and her mother's friend's husband. In both films, I question the purpose of the school, the function of classroom scenes, and the stereotypical personalities of the main characters.

I quickly discovered I had problems with each all-women's school story that I encountered. At the beginning of this research, I became so frustrated at the storylines that I

started asking myself, “What’s the point of these schools if the students aren’t even learning?” This paper will defend the answer I found to that question: a woman’s education is dependent on her socio-economic standing, the current historical/social climate, and other people, mainly teachers, who influence her life. A woman’s education comprises so much more than just her formal education, which I quickly learned. Further, while I cannot make specific curriculum recommendations regarding what these women should or should not be learning, I can assert that a woman’s education should prepare her for life after her education ends, that being a career, marriage, or otherwise.

Chapter 2

The Purpose of Higher Education and the Influence of Society in

The Group by Mary McCarthy

Introduction

The 1930s and 1940s marked a major time of transition for women in the United States that is reflected in Mary McCarthy's novel, *The Group*. Mary McCarthy considered herself an intellectual while living in New York, as well as a feminist (Fox 776). *The Group* was published in the same year as Betty Freidan's *The Feminine Mystique,* which is largely credited with starting the second wave of feminism in the United States. The popularity of her book was widespread and caused many women to understand they were being treated unfairly (Dicker 67-68). McCarthy, a Vassar College graduate in the class of 1933 herself, was well-aware of the true state of flux happening in the United States from 1933 to 1940. For readers, an appropriate historical understanding is crucial to understand the impact of this novel before analyzing the story. *The Group* takes place from 1933 to 1940 and is primarily set in New York City. This novel follows the lives of eight young women—Kay Strong Peterson, Mary "Pokey" Prothero, Dottie Renfrew, Elinor "Lakey" Eastlake, Polly Andrews, Priss Hartshorn, Helena Davison, and Libby MacAusland—as they explore life in the "real world" after completing degrees at Vassar College. The Group enters adulthood in an interesting time in United States history. During World War I, the number of women in the paid workforce increased as men left for battle. Following the end of WWI, however, women's presence in the workforce decreased. As men returned home and reclaimed their jobs, many women reassumed their traditional roles in the home. In fact, women were discouraged from working and told not to "steal jobs from unemployed men" who were returning from war (Hymowitz 311).

From 1920 to 1940, women hung in limbo. The twenty years between World Wars are when the Group are attempting to find their place as women in United States society. They are economically advantaged and educated, but they still struggle to make sense of these muddled

gender expectations. Their mothers experienced the suffrage movement and some were early women's rights activists who were willing to make sacrifices for the vote. At least one member of the Group, Dottie, feels as though the time where sacrifices are necessary has passed. Dottie tells her mother, "What society is aiming at now is the full development of the individual" (McCarthy 228). Dottie is right, and she indicates the stark change in beliefs that happened in a matter of years. These changes mirror the uncertainty that the Group has in determining the purpose of their education and what they will do after graduation. The women flirt with the idea of balancing careers and marriage for the first time.

A study conducted by Lorine Pruette in the 1920s indicated how young women's opinions about their futures changed rapidly. Pruette surveyed teenage girls and their ambitions, and she received mixed results. Thirty-five percent of her sample of young women between fifteen and seventeen indicated they "wanted careers and were willing to give up marriage and family for them." These girls would have witnessed at least part of WWI, which lasted from 1914 to 1918. They likely would have seen or known women who entered the professions during WWI. By the beginning of the 1930s, however, the number of girls wanting careers dropped significantly, according to Blanchard and Manasses. In fact, they "found that among young women eighteen to twenty-six years old, few were willing to forgo marriage for a career." Women's attitudes shifted drastically as they fused "liberal attitudes with traditional goals" (Woloch 407). The young women in the latter statistic reflects the age range of the women in *The Group*. Women are evidently aware of their freedom of choice. Rather than viewing marriage and a career as mutually exclusive, the "New Woman of the 1920s" was interested in combining the two despite the difficulty in doing so (394). Both real and fictional women struggled with society's shifting viewpoint on women. Frances Woodward Prentiss who experienced this

difficulty wrote, “We were reared, educated, and married for one sort of life, and precipitated before we had a chance to get our bearings into another” (398). Dottie indicates the women of her time are interested in the “full development of the individual,” or pursuing what the individual believes will develop the individual the most. This fictional change for the women of the Group is reflected in historical research. In fact, research shows the 1920s saw a “watershed of moral change” that the fictional women in *The Group* are forced to grapple with (398).

Historically, American state colleges and universities would admit men and women, but women often followed separate programs of education. However, there were private colleges that admitted only women. Generally, these single-sex colleges served only three purposes for women seeking a higher education: preparation for occupational roles (mainly teaching where qualification was received by attending “normal colleges”), preparation for social roles, and the “acquisition of cultural capital” (Durbin 2). At the turn of the century, many American postsecondary institutions for women also focused on elements of homemaking, specifically, through home economics. This concentration mixed traditional female pursuits like cooking and cleaning with newer practices that delved into home management, budgeting, and nutrition. Schools that did not focus on occupational preparation focused on fine arts, proper societal etiquette, and the humanities. These postsecondary schools also helped women uphold their status in society (2-3). Schools also filled in time between adolescence and the proper marriage age. At coeducational colleges, women and men had the opportunity to mingle with each other and go on dates, but these opportunities were not as readily available to women at single-sex colleges.

Members of the Group are economically advantaged which affords them the opportunity of attending a private single-sex college like Vassar. Attendance at single-sex schools varied

across the United States, as well as cost and type of school. Southern single-sex private colleges were primarily focused with producing polished young ladies at a high price, while co-educational state colleges in the West were substantially cheaper. Western state colleges also focused much more on agricultural programs. Private colleges like Vassar in the Northeast were more expensive to attend than their Western counterparts. Vassar College, established in 1861, is still a well-known and respected college, but it opened its doors to men in 1969 because of America's ever-changing social climate ("A History of Vassar College").

According to the Vassar College website, the original curriculum was known for its "boldness, breadth, and flexibility," and graduates from the college were a "breed apart" because of "their independence of thought" and "inclination to 'go to the source'" for answers. "Vassar girls" studied geography, astronomy, chemistry, and physical education. Classes were taught by the time's leading male and female scholars. Because men and women were expected to follow different curriculums, single-sex colleges, including Vassar, turned to curriculum changes to "produc[e] housewives rather than moral leaders" (Woloch 405). After 1925, Vassar girls were introduced to the interdisciplinary School of Euthenics which was "devoted to the development and care of the family" in sharp contrast with the previous generation. Marion Talbot's department of sanitary science at the University of Chicago in the 1890s covered classes in physics, chemistry, physiology, political science, and the modern languages to create "experts in modern urban life." This curriculum is shocking compared to Vassar courses which had names like, "Husband and Wife," "Motherhood," and "The Family as an Economic Unit" (405). Mary McCarthy's characters, however, never mention classes in home economics. Rather than starting the novel at the Group's first day at Vassar or at their graduation, McCarthy begins *The Group* at the wedding of one of their own, Kay. This presents an interesting dichotomy: the importance of

Vassar's formal education in these women's lives, versus how their lives change after receiving their degrees. In writing candidly about the difficulties of the time and marking the most important part of a woman's life with her marriage and her death, McCarthy unabashedly calls attention to traditional stereotypes of women through the actions of her characters. In doing so, she also raises important questions about the higher education of women. Why are these women formally educated? What are most important parts of their life? Why prepare for a career one will never have? *The Group* tackles these big questions and focuses on three large aspects of womanhood that can clearly not be taught in a formal setting: sex, marriage, and childbirth.

Sex

Dick Brown is a married, older man who lives in New York City. He meets Dottie at Kay's wedding where he continually has his "eyes on her" and they talk "quite a while" (McCarthy 28, 33). The two sleep together several days after Kay's wedding, but Dottie is unprepared. Dick is "most considerate, undressing her slowly, in a matter-of-fact way, as if he were helping her off with her outdoor things" (37). As they start having sex, Dottie, a grown woman and college graduate, acts like a child. She is unable to say "penis." Instead, she skirts around the word, only saying that, "She had never seen *that* part of a man," and, in reference to her own sexual organs, that she had never been touched "down there" (40). Dottie describes Dick's penis, having sex, and orgasming with the word "it," a sign she is not educated enough on the topic to feel comfortable addressing it directly. Sex is an expected part of marriage, seeing as childbirth, another expected part of marriage, requires conception, but she never received the necessary education about that part of life. During the encounter, Dottie is embarrassed and attempts to distance herself from "it." She is unprepared for the situation because of a lack of

honest sexual education. After sex, she references what she taught herself prior to that night saying, “she wished the books were a little more explicit” because they “mostly described nasty things like men making love to hens, and even then did not explain how it was done” (42). She refers to semen as “sticky liquid” and condoms as “the rubber things” (43), and when she begins to question Dick, he attempts to console her. He acts like a professor would with a student. He says, “My dear girl […] we just employed the most ancient form of birth control. *Coitus interruptus*, the old Romans called it, and a horrid nuisance it is” (44). Dick calls Dottie a “girl,” rather than a woman, and calls the birth control method they used “ancient,” which insinuates she should know about it already. He continues to teach her about sex, utilizes phrases like “what you’re feeling is natural” and “you must learn to know [your body],” and acts as a “satisfied instructor” afterward (46, 45). Dick also directs Dottie very candidly to, “Get yourself a pessary” (58). Dottie mishears him, thinking he says “peccary,” and does not respond, but cries instead, thinking that Dick called her a pig. Dick explains further, “A female contraceptive, a plug […] You get it from a lady doctor. Ask your friend Kay” (59). So, Dottie goes. She finds a birth control bureau, receives the appropriate information, and is fitted for a pessary despite never having heard of birth control before.

Dottie is not alone in feeling underprepared for sex. Sex education was hardly accepted, or promoted, in 1933, but opinions on the topic were changing. Ironically, New York City, where many members of the Group are based, became a hub for the sexual revolution. In the 1920s, young people wanted to “tear the cloak of shame and hypocrisy from sexual behavior and from public discussion of sex” but some health professionals did not agree (Hymowitz 289). Sex education was only a way for doctors and educators to discourage the transfer of venereal diseases, and sex’s purpose was for procreation only (Huber 28). A survey conducted in 1930 of

seventy-five medical schools in America showed that only thirteen of them had courses on contraception, and even fewer offered courses about sexuality. In one case, a twenty-one-year-old bride asked her doctor if there was anything she should know before her wedding night. She remembered that the "physician seemed uncomfortable and told her if she had any questions after her honeymoon, he would answer them then" (Hymowitz 298). When she returned from her honeymoon, she was pregnant and she and her husband had to scramble to provide for a family of three so soon after their marriage. Had her doctor informed this woman about birth control, this could have been prevented or adequately prepared for.

Margaret Sanger, who opened the first birth control clinic in the United States and fought for widespread sex education, recognized that sex's purpose was not purely for procreation (295). And, Maurice Parmalee, who later became a part of the F. D. Roosevelt administration, argued that, "ignoring the play function [of sex] would be harmful to society" and "youth [should] be taught all aspects of sex" (Huber 28). Sanger, while she agreed with Parmalee, expanded her views farther, saying "that the sexual freedom tacitly given to men should also be given to women, irrespective of the marriage union" (28). Dottie is exploring this sexual freedom for herself.

Dick's dominance over Dottie manifests in his knowledge over her, and, as the saying goes, knowledge is power. Sometimes, however, brute force is more powerful than knowledge, and Nils, Libby's beau, exemplifies that. At a party, Libby is convinced that her recent exploit, Nils Aslund, whom she met skiing, is going to propose (McCarthy 268). He studied English literature in college, is respectable, well-dressed, and foreign. After the party, they are to go to dinner together, "and that was where, she expected, if all went well, he was going to pop the question" (268). But, as the night progresses, Libby grows more and more uncomfortable. At one

point, Nils whispers to Libby, and asks her when he can be alone with her. This triggers the rest of the party guests to leave under the assumption that he was seeking privacy to propose, but that is not what Nils has in mind.

The party dissipates, and the pair begins kissing. He becomes rough, but, all at once, "her spine stiffened. […] She realized he was planning to seduce her" (282). Though Libby is clever, her wits cannot compare to Nils's brute force. The reader is likely aware that something is amiss about this situation. Nils forces himself on Libby, rips open her dress and pulls at her shirt. With the physical indication that Nils's strength is winning over Libby, she finally recognizes that she is at risk and must "throw herself on his mercies" to prevent him from raping her. It is only when Nils asks Libby if she is a virgin that he releases her. He says, "It would not even be amusing to rape you" (284). Libby, undereducated and inexperienced on this topic, never imagined a negative outcome. If women were not being educated on sex to begin with, how could they begin to imagine rape? Libby indicates that this encounter leaves her more hurt than she has ever been in her entire life. Despite being an incredibly educated woman, Libby's lack of a sexual education and perceived innocence is the only thing to save her from Nils going "berserk like the old Vikings" (284-285).

Housewife or Career Woman

One of the most accomplished women of the Group is Helena Davison. She is considered the "droll member of the group" because of her sense of humor, but her friends eventually discover that she is intelligent and "very mature for her age." Helena is registered to attend Vassar from her birth, and she is tutored in almost every subject imaginable through her childhood (McCarthy 126). Her mother talks about her constantly, describing her

accomplishments in detail, surely in the hopes of finding a marriage partner for her. Through several pages, Mrs. Davison describes her daughter's musical accomplishments, athletic achievements, art skills, endeavors in nature, games she knows, religious beliefs, dancing skills, places she has travelled to, languages she knows, and practical skills (126-128). And yet, Helena, by the end of the novel, is the only member of the Group who remains unmarried and unattached. Truly, it seems the only thing Helena is not interested in is having a husband and becoming a wife. Helena hardly speaks for herself, so the reader can see her mother's opinion on her daughter. Clearly, Mrs. Davison wants the best for her daughter, but constantly pressuring Helena to find a husband is what forces Helena away from it. Mrs. Davison repeatedly indicates how her daughter has had "*every opportunity*" to meet a man, but it is not enough. From the reader's perspective, Mrs. Davison seems ridiculous for thinking her daughter needs to do more. However, this may be indicative of Mrs. Davison's old perspective of the purpose of women's higher education. At the turn of the century, some women believed the more a woman could do, the better match in marriage she would make. Rather than making Helena more receptive to marriage, these extracurriculars make Helena independent. She marches to the beat of her own drum, regardless of what her parents believe, and she does well for herself by today's standards, though not in the eyes of her peers.

Evidently, standards of higher education have changed dramatically. Most contemporary college students attend college to best prepare themselves for a job or career that they want to have after graduation. However, in *The Group*, there are only three women who decide to follow what they studied in college: Libby, Polly, and Lakey. Libby finds work in a publishing house, Polly works in the medical field and balances her life as a wife and professional, and Lakey continues her studies in Europe as an independent scholar. Contrary to most of her classmates,

however, McCarthy describes Libby first with her major in college. This characterization, compared to her peers, is abnormal. For example, the readers meet Kay at her wedding, and Dottie while sneaking to a man's apartment. Helena is accomplished, Pokey is rich, Lakey is the leader, Polly is quiet, and Priss is the "group grind" (McCarthy 11). Libby, rather, is determined to break into the New York publishing scene before finding a husband. She reads manuscripts at the publishing house, summarizes them, and reports to a man named Gus LeRoy. Libby is not suited for this job, and Gus is aware of this. Rather than recommending the books that the publisher could put in print, she writes incredibly detailed book reports on each. Her work is pointless, and she is fired although she is using her education. Gus makes Libby acknowledge her position in society:

> You're one of thousands of English majors who come pouring out of the colleges every June, stage-struck to go into publishing. Their families back them for a while; a year is about the limit. Till the girls finally find somebody to marry them and the boys go into something else. (256)

Despite Libby truly being ill-suited for the company, she faces the stereotypes of a career woman that work against her. Libby tries too hard, it seems, and does extra work that the company does not benefit from. Later, she is placed in an agency as an assistant to a literary agent where she can use her people skills to make "$25 a week, reading manuscripts and writing to authors and having lunch with editors" (257). She is happier and better-suited as an agent, and she makes much more money than she did working for Gus. She promotes individual authors' work, and it requires little taste compared to what is required of an employee at a publishing house. Libby faces difficulty in her work life, which reflects the Group's belief that the subjects their peers

study at Vassar somehow correlates with their success later in life, namely in finding a husband. For example,

> The science majors as a group […] were about the lowest stratum at Vassar. They were the ones, as Kay said, you would not remember when you came back for your tenth reunion: pathetic cases with skin trouble and superfluous hair and thick glasses and overweight or underweight problems and names like Miss Hasenpfeffer. What would happen to them afterward? Would they all go home and become pillars of their community and send their daughters back to Vassar to perpetuate the type or would they go into teaching or medicine, where you might even hear of them some day? (263-264)

In pursuing a career, the women follow a path set only for men and thus, they do not have room for men in their lives. The women choosing marriage know that their classmates might give more to the world than just children and another happy home, but they choose it anyway. Despite their low status at college, the science majors had the greatest potential of being heard of after college, but they had no chance of marrying.

Polly, one of the Group's own, challenges this notion. Polly starts college as a chemistry major. She thinks "that she might be a doctor," but when her father loses his fortune, she has no choice but to work at the New York Hospital where her friends hope she would meet a "ravishing young doctor or pathologist who would want to marry her" (263). Despite working towards an admirable career as a doctor, Libby has a problem with Polly. According to Libby, "[Polly] was too placid and colorless, unless she smiled" (262-3). Polly is not beautiful, and Libby values Polly's looks over her educational pursuits. Her friends do not believe she should be a doctor, rather, her acquaintances can only manage to agree that Polly should be married. Even Polly's iceman has something to say, "You pretty girl. Why you no marry?" (329). And her

classmates, who all had dedicated time and energy to obtaining degrees "cried" when she explains that she is "waiting for the right man" (330-331). In waiting for the right man, Polly is putting marriage off and risking that it may never come because she is not ready for it although her social circle wants her to be. Following a short relationship with Gus, the same man who fired Libby, Polly agrees to marry a man named Jim "without ever being aware of saying yes" and cannot determine if she loves him (285). She does, however, admit that she is relieved she is engaged to him. At last, the science major with no prospects has the chance to settle down.

The Group feels the other majors, not just the sciences, are at risk of becoming old maids. According to the women,

> Astronomy and Zoology were a little different—Pokey had majored in Zoology and, would wonders never cease incidentally, last year she had up and married a poet, a sort of distant cousin who was in Graduate School at Princeton—her family had bought them a house down there, but Pokey still commuted by plane to Ithaca and was still planning to be a vet. Anyway, Astronomy and Zoology were different—not so dry, more descriptive; Botany too. Next to the Physics and Chem majors in dreariness came the language majors; Libby had narrowly escaped that fate. They were all going to be French or Spanish teachers in the high school back home and had names like Miss Peltier and Miss La Gasa. (264)

The leader of the Group, Lakey, goes abroad for several years to further her education where she lives with and learns from professors, art historians, and collectors in Europe which, Helena indicates, "broaden[s]" Lakey (474-475). One of the connections Lakey has is with art critic, Bernard Berenson, who graduated from Harvard and is known as an authority on Renaissance art. When she returns to America, Lakey brings "dozens of suitcases, thirty-two wardrobe trunks,

beautifully wrapped parcels tied with bright colored ribbon, and innumerable packing cases containing paintings, books, and china" (475). Lakey was clearly not struggling to live while in Europe, and may be marked as one of the most successful members of the Group at the end of the book. While pursuing her education in Europe, Lakey was also free to express her sexuality as she wished, something the Group never suspects is anything different than heterosexual. When the Group sees her again,

> It was Kay who caught on first. Lakey had become a Lesbian. [The Baroness] was her man. Slowly the group understood. This was why Lakey had stayed abroad so long. Abroad people were more tolerant of Lesbians, and Lakey's family in Lake Forest did not have to know. It was a terrible moment. Each girl recognized that she was, they were *de trop*. (476-477)

The most successful, respected, and powerful member of the Group would not marry a man, though she does have the Baroness in her life. Compared to the rest of her friends, Lakey is more outspoken and forward, and even appears "more feminine than before" (478). Lakey and the Baroness seem to have the best of both worlds when it comes to their careers and love. Both are "practical" and know how to sew, and Maria, the Baroness, studied nursing (479-480). Neither must compete with the other to maintain a dominant/submissive role in their relationship, and they generally both appear very happy to be with each other. While other members of the Group have settled for unhappy marriages or unfulfilling career paths, Lakey has escaped that. She found an equal in the Baroness and outlandish success in Europe. Men, it seems, are the problem.

Pokey, much like Polly, attempts to balance her career life and home life. Pokey studies zoology and manages to find a husband. Her family buys Pokey and her husband a house in New Jersey, which forces Pokey to fly back and forth between New Jersey and New York to continue

her studies. She simultaneously practices veterinary science while growing into her role as a wife. Pokey is a prime example of the modern woman who is attempting to balance her career and her home life. She is not willing to sacrifice one aspect of her life, a career, to have a husband and family. Her own family is wealthy, but Pokey still wants to work. Since Pokey is economically advantaged and has the ability to travel to study, she does.

Dottie's mother projects a common fear onto her daughter and her classmates. According to a classmate of Mrs. Renfrew's, "this new crop of girls was far less idealistic, less disinterested, as a body of educated women, than their mothers had been" (226). However, "Mrs. Renfrew had not believed it, noting to herself that Dottie and her friends were all going out to work, mostly at volunteer jobs, and were not trammeled by any of the fears and social constraints that had beset her own generation" (226-227). She continues to think that, "Dottie, with her poor health and Boston heritage, was terrified of becoming an old maid. That […] was the 'fate worse than death' for Dottie's classmates" (227). Mrs. Renfrew argues that "women in [her] day were willing to make sacrifices for love, or for some ideal, like the vote or Lucy Stonerism," but Dottie challenges her mother. She says, "sacrifices aren't necessary anymore. Nobody has to choose between getting married and being a teacher. If they ever did. It was the homeliest members of your class who became teachers—admit it" (227). Even with Dottie indicating that the Group does not have to choose between a career and a man, many members of the Group end up picking marriage over a career. The fact that this choice exists, however, is key.

Despite Dottie's extensive studies at Vassar, she still struggles to understand how life, literally, works. She repeatedly questions her mother and her peers for answers regarding men and her sexual practices. Once, Dottie asks Kay, "What did it mean if a man made love to you and didn't kiss you once, not even at the most thrilling moment?" (86). She recognizes that this

is something “not mentioned in the sex books” she has read and she uses her scientific-based mind to infer “perhaps it was too ordinary an occurrence for scientists to catalogue or perhaps there was some natural explanation” (86). Ironically, the science classes Dottie took at Vassar would have given her a better understanding of childbirth and sex. That knowledge, however, is missing from Dottie’s education.

Dottie’s experience represents a common struggle that women in the 1930s faced. If they could receive an education, often it was not comprehensive. There were bits and pieces of information, from childbirth and breastfeeding practices to the process of conception, that were simply missing from women’s educational discourse. And, though these women have access to information their mothers did not, there are still large gaps in information and important questions they could not find answers to.

Child-bearing

Priss’s husband, Sloan, believes that his education is more valuable than that of his wife’s. Although he never outright says it, his actions tell the entire story. Shortly after the couple is married, Sloan determines when they will try for a baby. Priss is “resigned” to trying to have a child (128). When their son, Stephen, is born, Sloan directs Priss as to how they will take care of him. Priss has very little say in the situation and accepts her husband does not consider her opinion to be valid. Sloan, a pediatrician, uses his child as an experiment to prove his way of raising children is the best way. This includes forcing Priss to breastfeed, even though Priss struggles to do so. In fact, Priss wants to impress and sexually satisfy Sloan by breastfeeding Stephen:

> Though she had not told Sloan, this was one of her principal reasons for agreeing to breast feed Stephen: so that she could give Sloan, who was entitled to it, more fun in bed. But so far nursing, like most of sex, was an ordeal she had to steel herself for each time it happened by using all her will power and thinking about love and self-sacrifice. (294)

Priss must use "all her will power" and sacrifice herself in order to do what her husband directs her to do. Sloan treats her as though she has no say over her child's life and is too uneducated to consider Stephen's well-being. After some time in the hospital, Priss receives the opinions of the other nurses and professionals and she becomes aware of Sloan's potential motivation:

> It crossed her mind that Sloan, who was just starting in practice, might regard her nursing Stephen as a sort of advertisement. He liked to make a point of his differences with dear old Dr. Drysdale, who had taken him into his office and who had practically introduced the bottle into New York society. Dr. Drysdale prided himself on being ultra-scientific, but Sloan said that all that boiling and sterilizing was inefficient and wasteful (not to mention the cost of the equipment), when you could tap nature's resource […] Priss had been proud of keeping her girlish figure and proud as Lucifer of nursing Stephen, but now her pride was deflated by the thought that Sloan was using her to prove his theories, like a testimonial in a magazine. (302-303)

Historically, women in the upper-classes and many cultures have viewed breastfeeding as a hindrance to everyday life. Well into the 1920s, European cultures employed wet nurses to take some work from the mothers who could afford to employ them. Many difficulties with breastfeeding, not unlike the difficulty that Priss was having with Stephen, would lead to women giving up the hope of ever successfully breastfeeding and turning to milk substitutes. However, it was not always the safest route to substitute breastmilk until a "scientific" solution was made

available, one that many woman decided to implement (Volk 307). Due to many evolutionary factors, such as the size of female breasts, a woman's own perception of how large or small her breasts should be, and increased brain size and consciousness in humans, many mothers struggle to breastfeed, even today. Primates and our ancestors lived in large groups, which exposed females to expecting mothers. This familiarized them with the concept of breastfeeding "through direct, informational, and socio-emotional support" (310). Women who experience a lack of support or information today are more likely to stop trying to breastfeed than those who have the necessary support and information (308). Therefore, contemporary experts today might argue that breastfeeding is the best practice, but due to external factors, like the support systems present and information to the right techniques to breastfeed successfully, the modern woman might forego the practice and opt for formula. Readers see first-hand what this lack of information and support looks like in Priss's experience with her well-informed and educated husband. Eventually, Priss's nurses reassure her and spend more time with her than her husband does, but she craves the same level of support from her husband. Rather than working as a team, Sloan knocks Priss down and bullies her, rather than comforting her. Sloan is truly a bully in their marriage, and Priss is afraid of him and, in turn, doing something wrong with Stephen.

Not only is Priss terrified of her husband, she is terrified of her son. She continually references how afraid of Stephen she is because she does not want to see how Sloan reacts to her actions. She fears failure and is overwhelmed and afraid. Her inner monologue is filled with words like "terrified," "fearful," and "scared" (McCarthy 295, 297). She acts timidly with her son, even though she should have a significant say in how he is raised. But, as Priss notices, she is focused on a different aspect of raising her son than her husband and the doctors are. Dr. Turner, Stephen's primary doctor, and Sloan focus on Stephen's physical growth while Priss

focuses on Stephen's emotions. Stephen spends most of the day crying, which embarrasses and upsets Priss. This highlights the differences in the couple's educations. Priss wants to stop his crying because she knows Stephen should not be upset. The doctors, on the other hand, only want to compare the child to charts they once studied in school (301). Sloan hears Stephen crying multiple times, from what might have been hunger but calls him "a healthy young fellow" and says crying is "good for his lungs" (292). The head nurse on the floor eventually takes matters into her own hands and speaks to Dr. Turner about putting Stephen on a supplemental bottle. Priss, though excited about finally taking care of Stephen, does not have high hopes. Even hearing the "word *bottle* made Priss bristle, no matter what adjectives were attached. She braced herself against her pillows and prepared to give battle" (305). When Sloan hears, he prepares to fight back himself and suggests a different cycle for the family to try at home. He indicates this might serve Stephen more effectively, and he indirectly claims that this change is his idea, not his wife's nor the head nurse's, who are both women. Priss accepts this and understands her position is that of a subordinate to her husband. She is described as "nodd[ing] meekly" with "no mind of her own" (310). For a woman with such an education, she does not approach situations like she has one.

Conclusion

The Group proves that learning is life-long and fluctuates with time. Almost immediately after their graduation, these women learn about the most fundamental part of humanity: sex. They tackle problems vigorously and learn from the encounters with other people they have. These women use their educations in a smattering of ways, but their social class is important to

remember. With their educations, they are not necessarily expected to go to work after completing their degrees, but they have the ability to do so.

Pokey and Lakey continue to study after completing their degrees at Vassar. Pokey travels back and forth between New Jersey and Ithaca, New York, to continue studying to become a vet. Lakey travels as well, but she studies art history in Europe. Polly works in a hospital. Dottie learns about sex from Dick and proves to be resourceful and perceptive although the situation ends in heartbreak. Helena takes all the great talents she learned from Vassar and before and becomes a progressive school teacher. Priss reasons with multiple points of view as she determines the best course of action for her child.

Kay, whom the story starts with and ends with, embodies the difficulty of having an education but choosing to be a housewife. As the story starts, so does her life with Harald. McCarthy wants to highlight this part of her life. She struggles to understand how she fits into the world as she balances a husband with a failing career as a playwright. She has experience in theatre as well, but it is always pushed to the side so she may focus on housework. In the end, this balance is too much for her. She, perhaps, feels the previous decade's pressure to choose a traditional path into marriage and home-making though changes were coming quickly to society. Her proper education gives way to threats and an unstable home life from Harald's multiple affairs, which leads to her institutionalization and later death.

Despite having these educations and aspirations, *The Group* never seems to be a book that is about education. While it exposes some backwards truths about society—for example, women being a part of higher education just for education's sake—it also serves as a case study for a specific time in American history. Mary McCarthy published *The Group* in 1963, coincidentally, the same year Betty Friedan released her groundbreaking *The Feminine Mystique*

and, whether she liked it or not,. McCarthy's work was a part of the second wave feminism movement. Women who read *The Group* were shocked at how forward chapter three was—"Get yourself a pessary"—and related to it. The women of the Group presented the world with a conundrum: "they graduate Vassar embracing the social responsibilities required of their class" and, in all cases except for Kay's, are happy to accept that "America is inevitably improving" (Jacobs). McCarthy made an astute choice in having her characters graduate from Vassar, despite it being an easy choice in her knowing the typical "Vassar Girl" herself. She said,

> For different people … at different periods, Vassar can stand for whatever is felt to be wrong with the modern female: humanism, atheism, Communism, short skirts, cigarettes, psychiatry, votes for women, free love, intellectualism. Pre-eminently among American college women, the Vassar girl is thought of as carrying a banner. (Jacobs)

And surely, if not in real life, the Vassar girls carried their banners fictionally thanks to McCarthy. In addition to expressing truths about society, *The Group* entirely seems to be about the women of the Group itself. The women always find ways to connect and reconnect with each other. They express their hardships to each other and, inevitably, their lives overlap. They struggle with men, marriage, careers, society, children, and money, together. Kay's wedding introduces Dottie and Dick. Libby introduces Gus LeRoy to Polly. Polly helps Kay in the hospital. And they come together in the last chapter to celebrate Kay's life and mourn together.

The women of the Group could never have prepared for the men that come into their lives. Their formal educations, while giving them power and surety in themselves, put them at a disadvantage for the life that they would be leading after graduation. Between generations, wars, and belief systems, the women were neglected many practical skills in their educations. While well-versed in rhetoric and able to "nearly [blow] each other up," none of the women in the

Group, “except Polly, could cut out a dress or make a bandage” (126, 480). Though all were expected to find men to marry, Lakey, a lesbian, could not possibly never find a man suitable enough for her tastes, and Helena would never find a man, period. This societal pressure to marry is what inevitably led to the first divorces in their class. At a class reunion, Polly said it was “plain […] that many of her married classmates were disappointed in their husbands and envied the girls, like Helena, who had not got married. In June the class would have its fifth reunion and already it had its first divorcees” (395). Their educations made them strong, capable women, but society had not developed enough for them to take full advantage of their degrees.

The social atmosphere at this time dictated the lack of clarity in the true purpose of the women’s educations, just as readers of *The Group* cannot be certain of what the characters studied at Vassar, but the women still utilize their educations exactly how they want. The Group’s mothers and grandmothers, who may have fought for women’s right to vote and joined the workforce during WWI were not fighting for complete social upheaval. Rather, they were fighting for a woman’s right to choose what she would do with her life. *The Group* shows how women can choose marriage through Kay’s character, careers, like Lakey and Libby, or mix the two, like Pokey.

Women today still fight the same fight that the Group did. The wage gap is as prevalent as ever, but more women than ever are employed and successful in fields previously dominated by men. Though McCarthy never “rode *any* wave of feminism” and “scorned special pleading based on gender,” her work provides a strong basis for pointing out gendered stereotypes and expectations of the time (Jacobs). If anything, this work yields a stronger insight into womanhood, lifelong learning, the effects of society on education, and constantly changing views on sex, marriage, and child-rearing.

Chapter 3

The Prominent Role of the Teacher in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* by Muriel Spark and *Dead Poets Society* (1989)

Introduction

Teachers are one of the most influential parties in the early development of children. Boarding schools often physically remove parents from their child's everyday life, and intensive day schools hardly leave room for parental influence. Teachers in these types of schools ideally take on the parental roles that children need. Pastoral care, or "help with personal needs and problems given by a teacher" to a student, is often incredibly important in independent schools ("Definition of 'Pastoral Care'"). Some boarding schools even employ live-in faculty members as "house parents" to "give the pupils a view of home life with a stable and happy couple" (Pozniak). Teachers at independent schools also often lead outside-of-class activities which can form valuable connections with their students. Through teachers' "nurturing and responsiveness to students' needs," they "provide a foundation from which children can learn about their academic and social surroundings" (Davis 209). If a school does not outwardly promote pastoral care, most teachers still search for valuable connections with their students. Children will take what they learn from their teachers in these settings to form their understanding of future relationships and how to regulate some social, emotional, and cognitive skills (209-210).

In this chapter, I will focus on two works that take place in a day school and a boarding school. There is a heavy emphasis on the teacher's role in school though they are set in two different time periods and cultures. The first work is *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie,* published in 1961 and set in Edinburgh in the 1930s during the rise of fascism. The second work is the film *Dead Poets Society* (1989), directed by Peter Weir, and set in the 1950s in the decade following World War II. *Dead Poets Society* is set in an all-boys boarding school, serving as a comparison between the media's interpretation of all-girls and all-boys schools. The two works are set in different places and time periods, so there are some cultural differences present. The two

teachers have similarities at first glance, but with further analysis, Mr. Keating, the protagonist from *Dead Poets,* is appropriately suited to be a teacher while Miss Brodie, the protagonist from *Brodie*, is not at all. Both parties approach their teaching very differently than their colleagues and, in both cases, their teaching is what leads to changes in their students. In Miss Brodie's case, however, her teaching is never fully about her students.

The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie effectively places the teacher in the spotlight of the narrative, so much so that the children's own advancement is pushed to the side. The filmic adaptation of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1969) takes artistic liberties by dressing Miss Brodie (Maggie Smith) in bright colors, which stands out in comparison to the rest of the grey school and her students' drab uniforms. If the narrative of the novel is not enough, the name of the work immediately indicates the focus of this novel. Her placement in the work's title marks *her* as the focal point, not her students or their educations. For example, in *The Group,* Mary McCarthy chooses to focus on "the Group" and the women who are a part of it, rather than the professors the women once had in college. Miss Brodie calls her students her "vocation," and is dedicated to them (Spark 22), but in all the wrong ways. Miss Brodie elects to educate her students using stories about her life. She teaches them about art, history, literature, and, sometimes, skincare, but she only teaches them using her opinions and personal experiences. This is a biased approach to education and one that makes her opinions seem like law. Miss Brodie blatantly disregards the set curriculum of the school and says that she needs to be the "leaven in the lump" to disrupt the teaching of the school. Miss Brodie believes in a hierarchy of subjects that her girls should follow and ascribe to. She says, "Art and religion first; then philosophy, lastly science. That is the order of the great subjects of life, that's their order of importance" (Spark 24-25). The Marcia Blaine School, where Miss Brodie teaches, employs a

curriculum that teaches their students geometry, Greek, German, Spanish, physics, chemistry, biology, history, art, music, English, and some sewing. Miss Brodie teaches some of the subjects that the school wants her to teach, but she places little value on the sciences. The Brodie set performs exceedingly well on their humanities examinations in the Senior school but not so well on their math and science exams. Brodie's lessons are laced with very clear fascist indoctrination, and she repeatedly praises the blackshirts, Italy, Hitler, the Nazi regime, and fascism. These preferences reflect on how the Brodie set interacts with Miss Brodie. Rather than teach, she indoctrinates. The teacher in *Dead Poets Society* could not be more opposite.

Dead Poets Society also focuses on the role of the teacher in the school story, although Mr. Keating is a much better teacher than Miss Brodie. Mr. Keating joins the Welton Academy staff as an English teacher. He is a Welton graduate, so it is suitable that he would return to teach. On the first day of classes, Mr. Keating literally takes his class outside of the classroom and recites poetry. His students immediately understand that Mr. Keating's approach to teaching is quite different than what they are used to. He implores his students to seize the day and make the most out of life, especially their time at Welton. He is passionate, funny, and relatable. His lessons cover the Romantic poets and some poetry composition, and Mr. Keating's encouragement of his students leads to several of them re-establishing a poetry club called the Dead Poets Society.

The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie

Muriel Spark effectively created a setting where the teacher is the center of the educational system, rather than the students. *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* follows the trials and tribulations of Miss Jean Brodie as she fights back against her traditional school with

enticing stories of men, and travelling. Miss Brodie, likely in her 30s or 40s, considers herself to be at her "prime," meaning her peak development as a woman. This is the best time in her life, and she is spending it "teaching" her students. A teacher's main focus is educating her students, which Brodie does, but in a way that limits intellectual expansion rather than foster it. Miss Brodie's ill-suited position as a teacher is evident through her curriculum, teaching style, and emphasis on sexuality in her students' educations.

Seven girls compromise the Brodie set, otherwise, the group of students closest to Miss Brodie. They all are identified by something different about their looks or their personality. Monica is a math whiz. Rose is known for her sexuality. Eunice, her athletics, and Sandy the particular way she says her vowel sounds which "enraptured" Miss Brodie (Spark 3). Jenny is the most beautiful and meant to be an actress, Mary is quiet, and Joyce Emily is a bad egg.

At Marcia Blaine, the Brodie set receives a different education than what the Scottish educational system calls for. When Scottish schools were first being established by Presbyterian reformers, people wanted,

> a godly commonwealth, whose members knew their religious duties from close knowledge of the Bible, a theology that required a literate public of both sexes. Schooling was 'serious, earnest, harsh, utilitarian, ordered, dominated by a desire first to bring all to personal eternal salvation through instruction in reading'. (Abrams 114)

This viewpoint changed over time, but strictly gendered ideals existed for centuries. In the 1860s, school attendance became mandatory for women, and basic reading and writing became required in curriculums as well. Previously, reading and writing were sharply gendered subjects, and only men and boys were literate. In school, girls normally studied "spelling, arithmetic, grammar, French, geography and 'the globes' (terrestrial and astronomical)" (115-116). With

these focuses, however, also came compulsory classes for girls that were not abolished until the implementation of the Sex Discrimination Act of 1975. Sewing classes were required for girls and forbidden for boys. Into the twentieth century, other courses like "cookery, laundry-work, homecraft, hygiene and sex education" were implemented in curriculums for girls only, and they fell under the umbrella title of "domestic economy" (116). Marcia Blaine, a Scottish school, is meant to give the girls classes in literature, history, and the liberal arts and sciences, but also train daughters of businessmen to work after college with modern classes like German language. The curriculum also expects most of the girls to become wives and mothers by training them with sewing skills. This adheres to Scotland's proposed curriculum for girls to be educated to become homemakers, but Miss Brodie ensures that her set will not receive an education like that.

The Brodie set excels in the humanities because Miss Brodie prefers subjects like art, history. Some of her lessons include "Italian Renaissance painters, the advantages to the skin of cleansing cream and witch-hazel over honest soap and water," and "the love lives of Charlotte Brontë and Miss Brodie herself" (Spark 2). Miss Brodie is not depriving her students of an education, but she is limiting what they can learn by exposing them to solely her opinions. Miss Brodie herself only knows how to do math by counting on her fingers, could not dream of teaching a science course, and permits the school's sewing teachers to do the girls' work for them. As a result of Miss Brodie's lessons, the girls of the Brodie set are "immediately recognizable as Miss Brodie's pupils, being vastly informed on a lot of subjects irrelevant to the authorized curriculum, as the headmistress said, and useless to the school as a school," which carries a negative connotation (1-2). Even with these advanced opinions, such as which Italian Renaissance painter is the best—"The answer is Giotto, he is my favourite" (8)—it feels as though basic, foundational skills, like doing math without using her fingers, are out of Brodie's

reach. She is an educated and experienced woman, but she is only capable of seeing her point of view and teaching the same. This mixture of concrete and abstract education communicate mixed messages for Miss Brodie's students. On one hand, her students are being exposed to an intellectual woman, but on the other, they are being refused their right to a proper education that was bought when their families paid for tuition. Miss Brodie's teaching style is also a source of problems.

Rather than objectively teaching, Miss Brodie subjectively teaches. She appears to be more interested in having a group of girls whom she can trust rather than a group of girls whom she can intellectually stimulate. She is confident in being able to influence her girls and says, "Give me a girl at an impressionable age, and she is mine for life" (6). Brodie lives up to her word and attracts and maintains a reliable set of girls to defend her. The support she receives from her students is what allows her to avoid being fired. However, her students come to notice how Miss Brodie disrupts the Marcia Blaine School's curriculum and typical teaching style. Upon directing her students to view a slogan hanging in another classroom that reads, "Safety First," she indicates that her colleague is wrong. Instead Miss Brodie says, "Goodness, Truth and Beauty come first" (7). During another lesson, Brodie tells her students to hold up their books "in case of intruders," who are not a part of the Brodie set and will disagree with Brodie's teaching style (7).

The girls are too young to know that their teacher might be teaching them in an unacceptable way, and their parents of the girls were "too enlightened to complain or too unenlightened" to complain (25). Miss Brodie purposefully takes advantage of her students to create a dictatorship in the classroom. Until Sandy's betrayal of Brodie, her students always follow Miss Brodie's lead, even when she bullies her students. Miss Brodie repeatedly pokes fun

at Mary Macgregor and the girls follow suit. On one occasion, Sandy considers being nice to Mary when Sandy,

> looked back at her companions, and understood them as a body with Miss Brodie for the head. She perceived herself, the absent Jenny, the ever-blamed Mary, Rose, Eunice and Monica, all in a frightening little moment in unified compliance to the destiny of Miss Brodie, as if God had willed them to birth for that purpose. (30)

Miss Brodie is not serving the girls at all, so much as the girls are serving Miss Brodie. Sandy continues, "the Brodie set was Miss Brodie's fascisti, not to the naked eye, marching along, but all knit together for her need and in another way, marching along" (31). The way Miss Brodie bullies and blames Mary is comparable to the way Hitler blamed the Jews for Germany's problems. Not everyone can be perfect, so Miss Brodie identifies Mary as the scapegoat and she accepts it. This manipulation is the problem with Miss Brodie, because educating the girls is never about the girls. Really, Miss Brodie is teaching the girls to be just like her: narcissistic fascists. They would believe Mussolini to be "one of the greatest men in the world" and Hitler's "new regime would save the world" (45, 131). Her set is completely infatuated with her and she has, nearly, undying support from them. They do not question her actions, nor do they question how she influences their own.

Miss Brodie believes her educational approach is sound, but it is flawed. After Brodie is questioned by the headmistress, Miss Mackay, Miss Brodie indicates what she believes education is:

> The word 'education' comes from the root *e* from *ex*, out, and *duco*, I lead. It means a leading out. To me education is a leading out of what is already there in the pupil's soul. To Miss Mackay it is a putting in of something that is not there, and that is not what I call

> education, I call it intrusion, from the Latin root prefix in meaning *in* and the stem *trudo*, I thrust. Miss Mackay's method is to thrust a lot of information into the pupil's head; mine is a leading out of knowledge, and that is true education as is proved by the root meaning. Now Miss Mackay has accused me of putting ideas into my girls' heads, but in fact that is *her* practice and mine is quite the opposite. (36-37)

Miss Brodie indicates that part of her educational approach is in bringing out what her students seem to already have inside of them but are being filled with other things. She is the one who determines what information will be led out of her students. Miss Brodie is, however, doing more "thrusting" than she thinks. The leading out of an education that Miss Brodie refers to may be the leading out of knowledge that women have inside of them. As a feminist, Miss Brodie believes that women are equal to men and deserve to have the same rights. Her "leading out" might be teaching her girls to embrace nontraditional roles of femininity rather than embracing the traditional roles the school is enforcing. It also might mean that the education needs to be led by a good leader: Miss Brodie. She knows what should be led out and when, much like Mussolini, who called himself "il Duce," meaning "the leader."

It is when the Brodie set progresses to the Senior school, however, that readers can see just how much of an influence Miss Brodie has had on her students, especially as they have to choose which course of study they will take: classical or modern. Mary is denied a spot in the more difficult classical side because her marks are not up-to-par. She accepts her position on the modern side, but not without deep frustration because, "Miss Brodie prefers [the Classical side]" (67). Miss Mackay, the headmistress, grows frustrated with the girls' connections to Miss Brodie and reminds them that their course of study "has nothing to do with Miss Brodie" (67). She asks, "What good will Latin and Greek be to you when you get married or take a job? German would

be more useful" (67). Miss Mackay wants to promote the modern path, opposite to Miss Brodie. The teacher should have had very little say in what the students decide to study and, although Miss Brodie is not dictating any choices, her preference is very clear to the children. Consequently, the set wants to impress her.

Sandy's betrayal of Miss Brodie involves the teacher's fascism and teaching style. After completing school, Sandy goes to Miss Mackay and tells her "[Miss Brodie's] a born Fascist," and she is right (Spark 134). Miss Brodie praises the blackshirts, Mussolini, and Hitler in her accounts of her travels in Italy and Germany. Her leadership is reminiscent of a dictator, which is often a component of fascism. After this betrayal, Miss Brodie is effectively out of her prime, is forced to retire, and considers who of her trusted set betrayed her. It is only close to her death that she can bring herself to think that Sandy was to blame. This betrayal aligns with problems that arise in the classroom out of power struggles. In several studies, relationships between teachers and students where both parties were "engaged in power struggles to gain the 'upper hand' as a result of teachers' excessive use of controlling behaviors" (Davis 213). Miss Brodie clutching for power over her students only led to her betrayal. Miss Brodie's actions simply do not reflect what a "good" teacher must do, in "[encouraging] intellectual exploration [in] young children" and "provid[ing]a foundation from which children can learn about their academic and social surroundings" (211, 209). Miss Brodie's teaching style stimulates her pupils' imaginations and sexuality rather than their realities and does not adhere to the school's curricular wishes.

The love stories Miss Brodie tells her students in the classroom enable the girls to experience an adult woman's sexuality as pubescent girls. Miss Brodie's stories start off innocently enough, speaking of her lost lover, Hugh Carruthers, who died in World War I. The girls of the Brodie set steadily grow more and more infatuated with Miss Brodie's life. Sandy

and Jenny, in fact, write a fictionalized account of Miss Brodie's relationship with Hugh. As the two visit over tea, they compare what they know about sex and ask each other questions about Miss Brodie's sex life. However, they come to the conclusion that Miss Brodie is "above" having sex or giving birth to a child (Spark 18). Jenny even suggests getting Miss Brodie to take them to the art museum to get a proper look at an unclothed Greek god. Their interest has been piqued thanks to Miss Brodie's informal approach to sexual education, a subject that is not appropriate for her to be teaching.

Marcia Blaine does not promote the same beliefs as Miss Brodie. At the school specifically, the Bible verse, "O where shall I find a virtuous woman, for her price is above rubies," rests under a portrait of the school's founder (2). Miss Brodie annihilates the school's expectations by speaking of her love and sex life. She disrupts the image of a virtuous woman with her romantic stories and becomes romantically involved with the school's music teacher, Mr. Lowther. As Miss Brodie goes through her own sexual awakening, her stories shift to reflect it. She shares stories as candidly as an older sister, not a mature adult, would.

Miss Brodie grows steadily, and so do her students. Miss Brodie is not a teacher in the Senior school, so her girls are largely out of her direct control. She no longer has as much influence over her set as she once has so Miss Mackay makes sure that the girls are separated as much as possible. However, Miss Brodie has some tricks up her sleeve. When she notices the girls are drifting and focusing more on their studies, she makes sure that the set has a way to get back to their leader. Jenny and Sandy teach Miss Brodie Greek at the same time they learn it because she is "determined to enter and share the new life of her special girls, and what she did not regard as humane of their new concerns, or what was not within the scope of her influence, she scorned" (86). Although Miss Brodie excels in Greek, the mathematics exams that the girls

take at the end of their first term at the Senior school leave her looking wide-eyed and disbelieving. Of course, she assures them, “the solution to such problems would be quite useless to Sybil Thorndike, Anna Pavlova and the late Helen of Troy” (87). The set, however, is still impressed and excited by their new studies, and are “captivated” by the Senior school and its offerings (88). This formalized education takes the set away from their leader and some of her influences. Miss Brodie simultaneously begins using her students as pawns to keep her connected with the school’s married art teacher, Mr. Lloyd.

Miss Brodie encourages her students, Sandy and Rose, to interact with Mr. Lloyd the most. He regularly paints portraits of the Brodie set, but, as the students grow older, it is only Sandy and Rose who continue to visit. Sandy is aware of her position in all of this, indicating how “plain” it is to see that Miss Brodie wants Rose to sleep with Mr. Lloyd, because Miss Brodie cannot, and Sandy will be the one to relay all the information to Miss Brodie (116). Rose has “instinct” and is beautiful, so she will take Miss Brodie’s place. This plan is unknown to Rose. Miss Brodie “liked to take her leisure over the unfolding of her plans, most of her joy deriving from the preparation” (116). Rose and Mr. Lloyd are never sexually interested in each other, but Sandy and Mr. Lloyd are. The two begin a secret affair, and Miss Brodie has no idea. She continues to inquire after Mr. Lloyd while taking care of Mr. Lowther, the unmarried music teacher at the school. Miss Brodie especially enjoys hearing how there is always some resemblance to her in all the portraits Mr. Lloyd paints of the Brodie set (118). Sandy becomes aware that Miss Brodie is “obsessed by the need for Rose to sleep with the man she herself was in love with” and indicates that the idea is not new, but the reality of this manipulation actually happening is new (128). Miss Brodie’s fascist leadership led her to intertwine her sexual experiences with her students. Her control over her students crossed a very strict line as she

began encouraging a sexual relationship with a teacher on her behalf. She made her sex life a part of her students' education. This is an action that would result in immediate dismissal today, and yet, it is not the affair that leads to Sandy's betrayal of Miss Brodie, but the fascist way that Miss Brodie made it happen.

On a first reading of the novel, I struggled to identify a problem with Miss Jean Brodie, just as the head of school, Miss Mackay, did. I initially thought of Miss Brodie as the older sister I never had. She is open about her life experiences, accepting, and has quips I could repeat for myself. She speaks of her life experiences honestly and openly. On second reading, however, I saw Miss Brodie as the manipulative teacher who takes advantage of her position to create a force of mini-me's to validate her "prime." At the end of her set's school experience, Miss Brodie has not taught them about life in general. Rather, she has taught them how to live a life just like hers. Miss Brodie teaches the girls everything she can about the humanities that she agrees with, praises Mussolini and Hitler in a country that will be fighting against them, and wonders why her own student would betray her. Excepting Mary Macgregor, the student Miss Brodie bullied the most, the Brodie set comprised some of "the brightest girls in the school, which was somewhat a stumbling-block to Miss Mackay in her efforts to discredit Miss Brodie" (125). The girls are educated in accordance to what Miss Brodie, an outlier to the Marcia Blaine School, considers best. Though the back panel of the novel reads, "Fanatically devoted, each member of the Brodie set—Eunice, Jenny, Mary, Monica, Rose, and Sandy—is 'famous for something,' and Miss Brodie strives to bring out the best in each one," I would argue that the thing the girls were most famous for was being a part of the Brodie set. The Brodie set could agree that, "without doubt, [Miss Brodie] was really an exciting woman as a woman," but they did nothing positive for them except let her live on in their lives beyond her death (124). Miss

Brodie is a story-teller and a career woman, but she is also manipulative and not an educator. She does not encourage any kind of intellectual exploration beyond what she offers to her students, nor does she support or care for them.

Miss Brodie is a model of intellectual exploration, but she never teachers her students how to explore themselves. In fact, it took some digging to uncover what the outcomes of the Brodie set are. By the end of the novel, Sandy is the most successful of them all as a published author, psychologist, and a nun. Jenny goes to drama school and marries, Eunice goes into nursing, Rose is married, Monica is married but develops a temper and divorces, and Mary is a shorthand typist but dies at 23 in a hotel fire. The only member of the Brodie set to have the most influence from Miss Brodie is Sandy, the very student who betrays Miss Brodie. This influential role that Miss Brodie has over her students only serves for *her* personal advancement, meaning the maintenance of her position as a teacher and the sexual experiences she can vicariously live through a student. In fact, the only encouragement that Miss Brodie gives is to Sandy and Rose in their pursuit of Mr. Lloyd for Miss Brodie's own benefit. Though I am sure there are arguments calling Miss Brodie a passionate feminist, the evidence going against her as a fascist who admits to manipulating her students both intellectually and sexually speaks against her forever. She is not a positive role model, nor should she be trusted with a group of young, impressionable students.

Dead Poets Society

From the beginning of *Dead Poets Society* (1989), viewers see the setting and school are more focused on preparing boys for their careers than their counterparts in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. Boys file into the Welton Academy's meeting hall carrying banners that read,

"Tradition," "Honor," "Discipline," and "Excellence." The school year opens as the literal "light of knowledge" is passed around the assembly hall in a candle-lighting ceremony, and the headmaster professes that 75 percent of last year's graduating class went onto Ivy League colleges. They are at the "best preparatory school in the United States."

The purpose of Welton Academy is known from the beginning of the film: to send the boys to college and prepare them for careers. Welton is, in itself an "aristocratic and conservative northeastern all-boys boarding preparatory school where self-expression comes to die and conformity rules the upper-class students" (Moran 66). This beginning is important to the progression of the film, as Mr. John Keating (Robin Williams) enters as the school's new English teacher. Mr. Keating graduated from Welton, with honors, himself. After the ceremony closes, the boys are immediately thrust into the educational atmosphere, asking each other if they want to have study group on the first night back at school. The boys, in the same way as the Brodie set, become known for certain attributes, but they are not focused around looks or sex. Todd Anderson (Ethan Hawke) is the new kid, Neil Perry (Robert Sean Leonard) is the leader, Charlie Dalton (Gale Hansen) is the delinquent, Steven Meeks (Allelon Ruggerio) is the genius, Knox Overstreet (Josh Charles) is obsessed with girls, and Gerard Pitts (James Waterston) is unfortunately named. None of them are "famous for sex" like Rose of the Brodie set, nor are they famous for their outward appearances (Spark 3). The boys are instead known for their status in school or their academic achievement. Priorities for the boys are very different than those of the girls. The most notable difference between the two groups is Mr. Keating encourages his students to expand intellectually. For example, Todd indicates he did not complete a poetry assignment. Mr. Keating relays a passage from Walt Whitman about "barbaric yawps" and brings Todd to the front of the class, asking him to "yawp" multiple times. Mr. Keating stands

with him as Todd brainstorms in front of the class and creates a free-verse poem. Miss Brodie, on the other hand, attempts to reel her girls back in once they have left her immediate influence by graduating to the senior school, saying she "had a hard fight of it during those first few months" (Spark 88). Rather than leave her girls to explore new elements of their educations, she brings them to other outside-of-class events and reminds her students of her importance. She successfully uses her students' free time to maintain a presence in their lives after they move beyond her class.

Viewers also see the presence of parental figures in the student's lives. Neil Perry has a father (Kurtwood Smith) who has an incredibly important role in the film, despite only being in a handful of scenes. As Neil's father directs him to drop one of his extracurricular activities at school, viewers continue to notice the importance of education for students at Welton, especially Neil. Viewers do not see Mr. Perry as a positive influence on his son. He is a dictator like Miss Brodie rather than a cultivator like Mr. Keating. The father places undue pressure on his son to do what he thinks is best for Neil, but never once considers that Neil might not want it. This parental interaction is crucial to the film's plot, in contrast with the limited interaction we get with the Brodie set's parents. In *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, the girls are hardly ever seen with their parents, and Miss Brodie holds the most influence over the girls. I would argue that, while Mr. Keating has strong influence over his students, Neil's father causes the most conflict in *Dead Poets Society*. However, viewers must consider the emphasis that the schools give regarding their students' educations. Girls at the Marcia Blaine School should be virginal and virtuous, while boys at Welton should be studious and manly. The initial emphasis on the education the boys are receiving and the monotony of their days before Mr. Keating enters their

lives provide the viewer the necessary understanding to comprehend why the boys are at boarding school: to learn, and to succeed.

The classes the students attend are chemistry, Latin, trigonometry, and English. The first three subjects would prove particularly useful if the boys are to enter into a medical or judicial field. Latin in particular would be useful should the boys decide to be doctors or lawyers. The classical emphasis on Latin is an educational overlap we see with *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, as Miss Brodie encouraged her set to continue through the more difficult classical curriculum, which involved studying Latin and Greek. English, it seems, is the class that the boys are the least prepared for in terms of material and teaching style. Mr. Keating enters the room without saying hello and encourages the boys to follow him into the hallway to view pictures and trophies of previous Welton boys. Mr. Keating emphasizes the Latin phrase "*carpe diem*," meaning "seize the day," as they are reading the poem, "To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time" by Robert Herrick. This poem advises the reader to "gather ye rosebuds while ye may," meaning to seize the day before you die. In reading this poem, Mr. Keating is encouraging the boys to make the most of their time at Welton. This, immediately, marks Mr. Keating as different from their other teachers. As Mr. Keating introduces himself to the boys, he mentions that they may call him Captain—a reference to Walt Whitman's poem, "O Captain! My Captain!"— and he becomes immediately connected with them. He makes jokes, gets the boys laughing, and transforms the formal classroom experience. Cinematically, Mr. Keating is placed on the same level as his students. He looks at them at eye-level and is even wearing a shirt and tie similar to his students. Mr. Keating is their equal, not their superior, a stark contrast to Miss Brodie who directs and dictates the actions of her students.

Additionally, Mr. Keating actively teaches lessons to his students in the classroom. However, there is still a disconnect between the education the boys receive from Mr. Keating and what their other teachers are teaching them. Miss Brodie and Mr. Keating are outliers, romantics, and disruptions in the school setting. Mr. Keating does receive more direct backlash from the school than Miss Brodie does, which is a large difference. In one instance, Mr. Keating instructs his students to rip the introduction to the anthology out of their textbooks. This attracts attention from a fellow teacher, Mr. McAllister (played by Leon Pownall). Mr. McAllister tells the students to quiet down, but upon seeing Mr. Keating, he is comforted, though shocked, at the seemingly acceptable rowdiness that the students are exhibiting. This is reminiscent of Miss Brodie instructing her students to hold their books up in the case of intruders, to appear as though the class is studying what they should be, when, in reality, they are not. Even with this destruction of property, something remarkable happens in a matter of seconds. On first command, the students do not believe that Mr. Keating is serious. When the camera angle pans to Charlie Dalton, viewers see his notebook page is not filled with notes from the lecture, but with two drawings of women's breasts. Mr. Keating's instruction forces Charlie to push aside his homemade pornography and participate in class. This interaction is easily-missed, but it speaks to Mr. Keating's teaching style. He takes something boring and makes it exciting. Miss Brodie also makes the educational setting exciting. She tells her students new stories every day, takes them to art museums and to tea, and introduces them to worlds that twelve-year-old girls could hardly ever imagine.

A big question when comparing Mr. Keating and Miss Brodie is whether the teachers are actively making their students into carbon copies of themselves. For the Welton boys, this manifests in re-establishing meetings of the Dead Poets Society—a secretive club that Mr.

Keating started when he was a student at Welton. They sneak off campus at night to read and write poetry outside of the confines of the school. For the Brodie set, this copying manifests in Miss Brodie teaching her students the things she knows and experiences, deviating from the curriculum, and living vicariously through her students. Mr. Keating's passion for poetry is compelling, and that passion is what makes his students admire him. He is excited about teaching his students, so they are excited about learning. He does not force his students to participate in the Dead Poets Society. Rather, the students seek it out themselves. And yet, mysteriously, Mr. Keating's copy of *Five Centuries of Verse* with an inscription in the front-matter detailing how to open meetings of the Dead Poets Society appears on Neil's desk. Mr. Keating tells a compelling story in how the boys could benefit from these meetings, which made the boys more interested in poetry and these meetings. He never explicitly directs the boys to do anything, so Mr. Keating is not acting out of the same dictatorial stance Miss Brodie does. Rather, the boys are interested in emulating parts of an interesting teacher's life from a more studious and curious perspective, rather than feeling complete infatuation and obsession with their teacher. Secret meetings are an excuse for boys to get off-campus, and, at their first meeting, an opportunity for the boys to break out of the confinements of their school's rigid rules to be noisy, dance around, and yell.

Mr. Keating's influence on the boys continues through the film. Neil regularly goes to Mr. Keating for advice, the meetings of the Dead Poets Society continue, and Knox finally uses poetry to win over a girl from the public high school. Everything seems to be great, until Mr. Perry discovers that Neil is a part of a local production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* Neil is cast in the key role of Puck the fairy and enjoys acting, something the film's viewers do not discover until after the first meeting of the Dead Poets Society. This interest is the beginning of Neil's end. As the film continues, Neil remains secretive. He refuses to tell his father that he is a

part of this play because he knows his father will make him quit. Neil understands that he is taking time away from his primary course of study, but he is also following the advice that Mr. Keating gave him: to do something that is completely for himself. Eventually, however, Mr. Perry discovers Neil is in the play and tells him to quit. Neil, knowing he is not on good terms with his father, approaches Mr. Keating for advice. Here, we see the teacher-student relationship taking on more of a parent-student relationship. Mr. Keating is more supportive and understanding of Neil and can understand his aspirations more clearly than Neil's father, who assigns him a path and gives strict direction. Mr. Perry gives the clear path that Neil's life must take while Mr. Keating gives advice on pursuing other routes. Before Mr. Keating, Neil would have continued on the same path rather than deviating, which shows how strong of an impact the teacher has on his student. However, Neil still feels the pressure to follow the path set by his father. Mr. Keating exhibits pastoral care, as he "help[s] with personal needs and problems [of a student] given by a teacher" in the physical absence of Neil's father ("Definition of 'Pastoral Care'"). Mr. Perry should have more of a say on how his son is educated over a teacher like Mr. Keating, but in both *Dead Poets* and *Brodie*, the teachers seem to have more impact on their students than the parents. Parents are responsible for paying for their child's education and decide what primary schools they will go to. The Brodie set's parents chose the Marcia Blaine School for its prestige, but the girls do not receive the education their parents pay for. The parents in *Brodie* do not have much of a say in their children's education after they are at school, but Mr. Perry in *Dead Poets* has too much say. During Neil's meeting with Mr. Keating, Mr. Keating never encourages Neil to act in the play, but he does encourage Neil to talk to his father about his dreams and interest in acting. This terrifies Neil, who knows that his father will not react well to his new interest in the humanities and arts which takes him away from the medical

school path Mr. Perry has established. Later, Neil tells Mr. Keating that he spoke to his father, although the viewer never sees that conversation, and Neil blatantly decides to ignore his father's wishes and participate in the play anyway. Neil is very flighty and emotional during this scene, potentially indicating that he might not have spoken to his father. Neil repeatedly mentions that he does not think his father will be able to make it to the play and that he is away on business, and Neil's frantic speech and panicked emotions show that he is worried and mentally declining. At the play, Mr. Keating and the rest of the Dead Poets Society are present for support, but Neil loses his focus when his father appears. After an argument following the play, Neil is thrown into a depressive episode which ends in his suicide. Cinematically, shadows shroud Neil, as if it is not himself who is acting this way. He moves slowly, deliberately, and quietly through his house, but not before placing Puck's crown on his head and embracing his character one last time. Neil is struggling to make sense of the individualism that Mr. Keating supports and the "tyrannical demands imposed on him by his father" (Giroux 46).

Viewers are left to make sense of Neil's death, but, as Catherine Douglas Moran concludes, "The tragedy of Neil's suicide reminds the audience that moderation in all endeavors maintains a balance between authoritative expectations and expression of one's self" (67). After Neil's death, both Mr. Perry and Mr. Keating exhibit signs of distress. Mr. Perry turns to the school to look for answers, presuming that Neil was influenced heavier there than at home. Mr. Keating sobs in Neil's desk in his classroom, but exhibits no more signs of regret. He remains stoic as he is fired, which causes the viewer to think of Mr. Keating in the right and Mr. Perry in the wrong. Mr. Keating never apologizes, because he does not believe that he is in the wrong, and the viewer feels an apology is not necessary. Mr. Keating is accused of being a catalyst of Neil's suicide, but I think he is really a catalyst for Neil's change in interest. It is true, Neil

changes because of Mr. Keating's influence, but all the boys change and learn how to speak for themselves. Todd, the quiet and reserved member of the friend group, is the first to stand on his desk in admiration of Mr. Keating at the end of the film. Knox chases a relationship that he feels he has no chance with. Charlie speaks his own mind so fervently that he is expelled at the end of the film for not betraying Mr. Keating. I believe it is very clear that Mr. Keating is not the one at fault for Neil's death. The film does not permit the viewer to see anything different. Mr. Keating serves as an appropriate advisor to Neil and tells him to approach his father to discuss his feelings about Neil's interests. He does not overstep the boundaries between teacher and student. Mr. Perry, however, is evidently the party at fault. He is unwilling to accept his son going down any path but the one that will end in medical school. He tells Neil to drop the school annual and the play, both of which Neil genuinely enjoys participating in. At the end of the film, when Neil sees his father in the recital hall at his play, Neil can hardly continue with his performance. His father's presence is very emotionally jarring, and his father takes Neil out of a positive, congratulatory setting into a negative, reprimanding setting. He even tells Neil he will be leaving Welton and going to a military academy. Though Mr. Keating is a catalyst for Neil's passion toward poetry and acting, his father's harsh action and refusal to let Neil explore any subject aside from what will prepare him for medical school is what drives Neil to suicide.

Though *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* has no extreme tragedy to compare to, the close relationship that Neil shares with Dr. Keating is similar to Sandy's relationship with Miss Brodie. Sandy is repeatedly the member of the Brodie set who is closest to Miss Brodie, though Sandy does not respect her teacher as much as Neil respects his. Sandy consistently tries to figure Miss Brodie out, just as Neil tries to determine the most appropriate course of action with two conflicting views from authoritative figures in his life. In both Sandy and Neil's cases, their

actions lead to betrayals of the teachers. Sandy herself takes action against Miss Brodie and her fascist regime, and Neil's father takes action against Mr. Keating and the school after Neil's death. Sandy herself betrays Miss Brodie, while it is the surviving members of the Dead Poets Society who betray Mr. Keating. Neil never blames Mr. Keating for his death, and Mr. Perry never trusts Mr. Keating in the first place, so he has no loyalty to surrender though betrayal. The surviving members of the Dead Poets Society are forced to confess themselves to the school and sign a paper that states Mr. Keating implored them to revive the Dead Poets Society, instructed Neil to disobey his father's orders, and played a direct role in Neil's death. All the boys sign the document, excepting Charlie Dalton, who is expelled as a result, and Mr. Keating is dismissed from Welton. Mr. Keating accepts his dismissal because, as Henry A. Giroux indicates, "As soon as politics crosses over into the realm of power and politics, Keating presents himself as incapable of acting on his own behalf" (45). Even with the acceptance of his dismissal, the remaining Dead Poets members take a literal stand and climb atop their desks to say, "O Captain! My Captain!" They profess their loyalty and respect to Mr. Keating one last time despite their forced betrayal.

By the end of the film, viewers are left to consider Mr. Keating's teaching style and determine if the beloved teacher is wronged. In my own opinion, I believe that Mr. Keating did not solely contribute to Neil's death. Rather, the conflict of two belief systems, that of Mr. Keating and Mr. Perry, leads to an inner turmoil in Neil that results in his death. Mr. Keating can never have anticipated Neil's suicide. Viewers know what Mr. Perry and Neil's relationship is like, but Mr. Keating can never understand the severity of the situation because he never meets Mr. Perry. Even with this unfortunate situation, Mr. Keating remains a positive example of a

teacher. He approaches English with passion and dedication that is recognized by his students and not once does he attempt to make his students his followers or carbon copies of himself.

Conclusion

Dead Poets Society (1989) is perhaps the most famous school film of all time, and it also showcases the teacher as a focal point. However, the film itself focuses more on the impact of the students' English teacher, John Keating on them. The famous, "'O Captain! My Captain!'" scene shows the boys standing atop their desks and calling Mr. Keating "Captain" is a perfect example of the students' dedication to their teacher even after he is fired. This is an example of them, literally, standing up for what they believe is right. His students willingly defend Mr. Keating after acknowledging Mr. Keating's influence on Neil Perry, the boy in their year who kills himself. The phrase "O Captain! My Captain" is from the poem of the same name, written by Walt Whitman in 1865 after Abraham Lincoln's death. Whitman is mourning the death of his "Captain." The poem appears at the beginning of the film, suggesting Keating's premature dismissal. Keating refers to himself as the "Captain" of their group, and in this context, he anticipates that he will guide them through rough waters. *Dead Poets* showcases the influence of the teacher's life on his students, rather than focusing solely on the teacher's life itself, like *Brodie*. Though this is an all-boys' school movie, I believe that its popularity indicates a consumer interest in the school story. The students in *Dead Poets Society* experience much more learning in the classroom setting and a higher level of importance of education in a child's life and upbringing.

Miss Brodie and Mr. Keating both teach what they are most passionate about, but Mr. Keating fills a gap in the educational experience of his students. He works to evoke the same

passion for leaning and poetry that he has in his students while Miss Brodie works to instill the same beliefs of every topic in her students. Miss Brodie teaches her students a rather comprehensive education considering Scotland's educational standards, but the girls only learn about their teacher's experiences. The teacher becomes the history lesson. Art critiques always come from Miss Brodie, not the students. Miss Brodie's teaching does not encourage the girls to think or act for themselves—it teaches them to act like Miss Brodie. Mr. Keating, on the other hand, approaches teaching English with vigor. The students are not particularly interested in the topic, knowing they will likely continue to a career field that is not based in the humanities, but they become excited about it. In fact, the students in Mr. Keating's class discover the Dead Poets Society that Mr. Keating started when he was a student at Welton and begin holding revival meetings off-campus and past curfew in an old Indian cave.

Perhaps part of the reason why the boys in *Dead Poets* are not so interested in learning about English in the first place is because they do have set career paths. They are attending a well-known and well-respected preparatory school where most of the boys will continue onto Ivy League colleges. After receiving their degree from an Ivy League, it would not matter much what they studied, so much as the fact that they graduated from a college like Harvard. The girls in *Brodie* are faced with uncertainty in their life after college. They could continue to higher education, pursue careers, or become mothers and housewives. With this uncertainty, educators and educational institutions might not know what to prepare them for. The Brodie set learns from a woman who is not married, has a career, and is sexually active, but they are students at a school that promotes marriage, whatever comes with marriage, and purity until marriage. The Marcia Blaine School promotes a traditional approach to education and offer classes in the sciences, math, humanities, and arts. This is an education that touches most of the bases and keeps the best

interests of the students in mind. Parents are happy to send their children there, and children are happy to go. However, a teacher like Miss Brodie, who is a "war-bereaved spinster" and a feminist, teaches her students with what she has learned informally (Spark 43). In Scotland at the time, women over 25 were often prevented from receiving their full teacher certification because they were not admitted to training colleges to finish their degrees (Abrams 124). Women turned to independent learning by attending "a variety of public and private lectures and classes both for self-education and specifically to train as governesses or teachers, despite objections that the subject matter was unsuitable or irrelevant to their domestic duties or that the presence of both sexes made them 'improper and dangerous'" (129). She sees herself as incredibly successful and influential with the humanities, so the humanities and her biased opinions will be what she teaches to her girls. Miss Brodie is an outsider in a system that wants to approach education traditionally. The school seems to want education to be busywork before marriage, while Miss Brodie seems to promote education for education's sake.

These distinctions are important because deviance is sometimes appropriate when there is certainty in your future. For example, a student may take a Pilates and yoga class in their senior year of college after securing a job post-graduation, or a soon-to-be-married person may throw a bachelor/bachelorette party. Where paths are certain, detours are common. Thus, the boys have more time to dabble in other topics than the girls do. Consequently, the girls might be wronged in not having all the career/life preparation they need. While I am not at a place to recommend changes to curriculums, I can say that it always seems there is something missing in a woman's education. If they only go to school to learn to cook, clean, and mend clothing, they need more of a formal education, or vice versa. Even the young women in *The Group* feel ill-prepared for their lives as mothers and they have completed advanced degrees.

The largest problem with *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* comes from what Miss Brodie is teaching her students and how she teaches them. Her fascist beliefs take over her classroom and her every day interactions with her students, and that is not permissible. As a woman, she believes in being educated because it is the right thing to do. How could a woman not be educated? She is the prime example of an intellectual, but she is too fervent in her own passions and opinions to allow her students to become intellectuals themselves. Miss Brodie's students are among the brightest students in the Marcia Blaine School, showing they have been taught, but not to form their own opinions. *Dead Poets Society* shows a school with students who can afford to manipulate their course of study. The film itself is so exciting because the boys grow excited about education. They become so engrossed in the humanities that, eventually, parents must intervene to set students back on track. This intervention comes from Mr. Perry. He wants Neil to focus solely on getting to medical school. This conflicts with the passion for acting Neil pursues after receiving encouragement from Mr. Keating to seize the day. The inner turmoil that ensues is what eventually leads to Neil taking his own life.

Teachers and what they teach have profoundly impacts on their students. Miss Brodie's fascist tendencies resulted in her nearly complete control of a set of easily-coerced girls. Mr. Keating's impassioned poetry lessons coupled with strict parental guidance resulted in the death of a student. The gender differences between the two films have resulted in two vastly different circumstances for the students of each school. The girls seem to not have as much direction as they need, and the boys, at least at the beginning of the film, are too set in their ways. In each case, the students are presented with conflicting life paths. Miss Brodie's word is law, and her view on an ideal woman is clearly herself: unmarried, intelligent, independent. Mr. Keating does more for his students, and it is because he inspires them, rather than directing them. The boys

have several other teachers who are constructively aiding their educations, so Mr. Keating's romantic approach to the humanities cannot totally ruin their chances as a professional. The Brodie set, however, only has access to what Miss Brodie gives them. Even after the girls move to the Senior school, she still maintains some control over them. When her students remember her, they are not reminded of her enlightening school lessons, they remember her "prime," and her old stories. Though she is influential in their lives, I think the only student who really benefits from Miss Brodie is Sandy. Although she betrays Miss Brodie in the end, Sandy's psychological research stemmed from her interest in Miss Brodie's mind and the people, namely Marcia Blaine's art teacher, Mr. Lowther, who are infatuated with her.

Although Mr. Keating and Miss Brodie share similarities, it is undoubtedly true that Mr. Keating is a more suitable teacher. *Dead Poets Society* is a much better representation of the school story than *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*.-Mr. Keating is not the leader of the Dead Poets Society as Miss Brodie is the leader of the Brodie set. Where Miss Brodie makes sure to interact with her students outside of a classroom-based educational setting, Mr. Keating acts solely in a classroom-based educational setting, excepting his attendance at Neil's play. He does not meddle with the personal lives of his students, and when he does give advice, it is only that: advice. Additionally, Mr. Keating is never present at the Dead Poets Society meetings. Although his inspiration catalyzes their regular meetings, he never pointedly directs his students to have these meetings, and they quickly become their own. Contrastingly, Miss Brodie is described as, "the leader of the set" and maintains control over the girls long past her time as their teacher ends (Spark 118). Miss Brodie uses the girls to her advantage. In some ways, it seems the girls only act to confirm Miss Brodie's use of her prime is not a waste. She repeatedly enforces her fascist beliefs on her students, even if it is unintentional, to show her students what she believes is right

and wrong. There is no objective education coming from Miss Brodie. She also encourages a relationship between a student and another teacher so that she may live vicariously through her student. Miss Brodie uses her students in ways that teachers should not.

The focus of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* is wholly on Miss Brodie, where *Dead Poets Society* rests primarily on the students. Mr. Keating evidently plays a large part in his students' lives and throughout the film, but the film functions more as a school story, rather than a close look at a teacher's life. Even in the names of the two works, it becomes clear that the focus of the stories are on two different parties. *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* seems to be more of a coming-of-age story for Miss Brodie rather than the girls who are in it. The Brodie set's age never seems to matter when compared with the "prime" of Miss Brodie. Their development seems only to matter when it is useful to their teacher. For example, Miss Brodie had to wait several years to enact her plan for an affair involving Sandy, Rose, and Mr. Lloyd, because the girls were simply too young. She uses the girls to teach her Greek, keep her position at school, and entrusts them with her most lavish secrets and stories. But, as readers will have caught, the story focuses on how the girls positively benefit Miss Brodie's life, not how Miss Brodie can positively benefit theirs. Evidently, Sandy's life specifically would have been very different without Miss Brodie's meddling. Mr. Keating, on the other hand, did more of the "leading out" of education than Miss Brodie did. He encourages his students to dig to find what they really believe in. This approach to education does cause problems with conflicting ideas, but, overall, gives the boys at Welton a more comprehensive look at education as they are preparing to enter the workforce. As Catherine Douglas Moran writes about *Dead Poets Society*, "Manhood and masculinity, as the youths discover, lie not in conforming to societal demands, but rather in breaking those boundaries and exerting one's independence. Ultimately, either the success or

failure to “seize the day” decides the fate of the transition from boyhood to adulthood” (66). Mr. Keating sees that his students are too career-oriented at the beginning of their school, and he makes the boys excited about education. Miss Brodie, on the other hand, makes the girls excited about her. The boys come to want an education while the girls want story-time.

As a whole, *Dead Poets Society* focuses much more on education than *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie.* Due to differences in gender expectations, age, and the role of the teacher, one work holds a better representation of a teacher than the other. Mr. Keating is, by definition, a good teacher who “provide[s] a foundation from which children can learn about their academic and social surroundings” and encourages intellectual exploration and growth (Davis 209). Miss Brodie does the opposite of Mr. Keating: she limits her students, coerces them into roles that they do not, often, want to assume, and deprives them of an education that the Marcia Blaine School wishes them to have. Mr. Keating is viewed as one who is older than his students but otherwise an equal, while Miss Brodie is a force to be reckoned with. She is bright, colorful, and outspoken, but she hides her improper teaching practices from her superiors as best as she can. The Brodie set have extensive knowledge about art that their fellow peers would not have, and their test scores are also known through the school. Mr. Keating, on the other hand, takes his students to a courtyard where they march around in the view of another Welton faculty member. His teaching practices are well-known at Welton while only the results of Miss Brodie’s teaching practices are known at Marcia Blaine. Mr. Keating’s role as a teacher is preferable to Miss Brodie’s. Keating shows an active interest in the well-being of his students, while Brodie wants to use her girls as pawns for her own advancement. In the end, as both teachers are betrayed, it is important to remember Sandy’s comment at the end of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*: “‘It is only possible to betray where loyalty is due’” (Spark 136).

Chapter 4

Conclusion:

Short Lessons and Shorter Skirts

At the end of this analysis, I still find that I am asking myself what the point of education for these women is. It has been difficult trying to nail down a specific reason for this education, especially considering how education has changed. In higher education today, students have specific majors and an idea of what they want to do with the rest of their lives post-graduation. Many majors have professional development integrated into their curriculums. I myself am a professional writing major, which is much more focused toward professional development and career preparation than being a literature major. I have known from a young age that I want my education to lead to a career in a specialized field and that is why I am in college. Clearly, however, there are other interpretations of schools that exist in the popular media. Aside from my discussion on *The Group, The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, and *Dead Poets Society,* I found two movies, *All I Wanna Do* and *Tanner Hall,* which established my interest in all-women's schools and their representations. I found these films to be poor representations of all-women's schools. Compared with the relatively positive example of all-men's boarding school in *Dead Poets Society*, these all-women's schools have missed the mark. The classroom setting, the purpose of the boarding school, and the repetitive "tropes" associated with the personalities of main characters proved problematic.

Boarding school, unsurprisingly, is still school. One would imagine that watching a boarding school movie would include more than one classroom scene. In movies about all-boys boarding school, most notably, *Dead Poets Society,* some of the most important scenes happen in the classroom, including the famous "O Captain, my Captain" scene. And yet, the two movies that I analyzed had a total of five classroom scenes. Four of those five were included so that a perverted male teacher could express that he wanted to have sex with one of his pupils. Contrary to what the films are representing, students spend the majority of their days at school in classes

with extracurriculars afterwards and study halls at night. The kind of time that the students in the films spent in the classroom or doing extracurriculars was simply not enough to be accurate to the experience I had and was expecting from the films. Odette (Gaby Hoffman) from *All I Wanna Do* brought her own horse with her to school, but she didn't interact with it at all until the very end of the film. Odette is also extremely interested in politics, and in the one classroom setting of the entire film, her male teacher makes sure to hold her back after class to offer her the opportunity to attend a conference with him. The entire scene is uncomfortable. Close to the end of the film, the teacher appears again and is inappropriate once more. Odette and her boyfriend Dennis (Matthew Lawrence) are visiting and planning on having sex for the first time, when Odette's teacher, Mr. Dewey (Robert Bockstael), interrupts the pair. Though he indicates to Odette that this behavior is not appropriate, he also mentions that he can make sure there is no unnecessary disciplinary action as long as Odette and Mr. Dewey can agree upon a "private arrangement." Mr. Dewey's body language and the promiscuous situation that he finds Odette and Dennis in allows the viewer to understand that the "private arrangement" he is referring to, in fact, is a reference to sex.

All I Wanna Do is not unique in employing an older male teacher who expresses sexual interest in one of his students. In *Tanner Hall,* resident "sex-crazed" student Kate (Brie Larson) routinely messes with her teacher, Mr. Middlewood (Chris Kattan) so much so that he begins to fantasize about her and running away with her. Mr. Middlewood and his wife have trouble with intimacy, and the only time that Mr. Middlewood can perform sexually is when he is thinking about Kate. In the two classroom scenes in the movie, both focus on their "relationship." No learning actually takes place, and the most education-oriented topic that is discussed is what book the class should read next, only so Kate could respond with, "*Lolita*?" (*Tanner Hall*). *Lolita*

is a novel by Vladimir Nabokov that follows an adult man who becomes obsessed and sexually involved with a 12-year-old girl whom he nicknames Lolita. The parallel here is to the relationship that Kate and Mr. Middlewood could have if they were both to become romantically involved with each other. The classroom settings in *Tanner Hall* are unimportant for the true plot of the film, but it shows just how vulnerable the girls are in these fictionalized worlds. I was appalled when I first watched this film. Of course, much like Miss Brodie, if sex was in any way involved in the classroom setting, teachers would face serious repercussions. We only see justice served in Mr. Middlewood leaving the school at the end of the film, but Kate is very obviously left scarred as the narrator, Fernanda (Rooney Mara), indicates Kate never leaves campus except for school breaks.

The purpose of the boarding schools themselves vary from film to film, but none that I have found, were there for a purpose that many young women go to them for: to better themselves and receive a good education. In *All I Wanna Do,* the boarding school serves as a setting and something for the plot to revolve around. Boys are at risk of infiltrating the girls-only campus, so a fight over the school ensues. The main conflict of this movie is the fact that school's board of trustees is fostering a merger with an all-boys school, something that more girls than not do not want to happen. Immediately, the attention of the plot is directed at boys, a population that is definitely not meant to be at an institution claiming to be all-girls. Single-sex educations claim education without the other sex for one reason or another, so this movie is absolutely not focused on the education of the girls at Miss Godard's School for Girls. The purpose of the school can be deemed only as a setting for the girls to assert that they do not want boys to be a part of their education and that they should have a say in what happens to their education. These are both admirable, and, seeing as the women in *The Group* also need

educations where their choice is involved, this is appropriate. However, this same scene could have happened in a public school, a non-boarding private school, or even on a street corner. The girls are staging a protest about something they do not like, which does not have to be set at an all-girls boarding school to make happen. This setting is convenient because there are no parents present, the girls can form their own ideas without parental influence, and it is exciting in general. One must recognize the irony, however, in the girls wanting a say in their education when they hardly spend any time in the film being educated. If we, the viewer, ask what the point of this education is, it is so the girls may learn to stand up for themselves. I would argue that we do not see any drastic character development in Odette, however, like we see with Neil Perry in *Dead Poets Society*.

Tanner Hall proves to be in a similar circumstance. For main character Fernanda, the boarding school is a place where she can be with her friends and, following the plotline, be involved with her mother's friend's husband. Boarding schools are often seen in secluded areas, and this school happens to be no different, located in what looks like a castle in rural New England. But, because she is so secluded and her parents aren't around to tell her no, she goes off-campus with an approved visitor, Gio (Tom Everett Scott), and eventually becomes his mistress. The film spends much more time on this romantic relationship than in the classroom setting. In fact, the majority of the film is centered around ideas of romantic and sexual awakenings with men who are much older than the female partner. Gio's relationship with Fernanda is incredibly inappropriate, and Gio takes advantage of the girl. The film's directors clearly saw a forbidden relationship as being more exciting than what the girls could ever have been learning in the classroom, so that is where they placed the focus of the film. Just as *The Group* purposefully starts at Kay's wedding, *Tanner Hall* purposefully focuses more on Gio and

Fernanda's relationship. As a senior at Tanner Hall, I would have thought that the students would be focused on building more memories with their friends and fellow peers, but that is evidently not the case. Without the proper supervision, the girls are left doing whatever they want, and it does not have anything to do with their studies.

Although taking place in different years, several personality types of main characters become evident. In *All I Wanna Do,* the girls who are in this boarding school with the main character, Odette, are girls of all personalities. Verena (Kirsten Dunst) is an outspoken feminist, Tinka (Monica Keena) is sex-crazed, and Tweety (Heather Matarazzo) is bulimic. I think including these characters in a single friend group at all-girls boarding school is a misrepresentation, although *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* and *Tanner Hall* also include similar characters. Sandy and Fernanda are outspoken, just like Verena; Monica and Lucasta (Amy Ferguson) are intelligent, just like Odette; Rose and Kate are known for sex, just like Tinka; and Joyce Emily and Victoria have mental health and adjustment problems, just like Tweety. While girls who identify with these classifications are present all over the world, I find it abnormal that they are present in such a high concentration in these three films. Viewers of these films might subconsciously expect these women to be present in all, all-girls schools. Based on my own experience, I have found that people have a stereotype of all-girls boarding schools where the girls were only sent there because their parents did not want to raise them, they wanted to be around more lesbians, or they had a serious drug, alcohol, or mental health problem. Although this was sometimes true, it was not for all the students, and it definitely was not present in each friend group like the films and novel make it seem. Although none of these characteristics are necessarily bad, the disproportionately large number of problems these girls appear to have makes the representation of boarding schools less positive. These problems become indicative of

the character. For example, Kate in *Tanner Hall* is the one who flirts with her superiors just as Mary from *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* is always blamed for the group's problems. I had never witnessed eating disorders in my experience at all-girls school, but I am aware that it is a large problem with young girls. A study conducted in the 1990s asked 160 boarding school matrons if they had ever witnessed anorexia or bulimia in their students. "Of the 114 usable responses, 78 (68%) reported coming across either anorexia or bulimia…" in their time being employed as a matron (Stewart). This percentage was not of all boarding school matrons, nor all-girls school matrons, but is still a staggering percentage compared to the national statistic of 3% of Americans who suffer from an eating disorder ("ANRED: Eating Disorder Statistics"). Additionally, to address the preferences in body image of a time, "Images of the ideal woman's figure became increasingly thin and tubular beginning in the 1950s… The number of diet articles in girls' and women's magazines also increased during this period and continued to do so… By the end of the 20th century, the image of the ideal woman was between 13% and 19% below normal weight for her age and height" (Cole 42). It would make sense for an eating disorder to appear sometime because of this statistic, but not in a way that makes light of the issue or perpetuates a stereotype.

Single-sex, all-girls education is a way for young women to develop and become successful. These movies do very little to further feminism and feminist belief. These movies make all-girls education look like sneaking off campus, perverted teachers, and mental health issues can be expected from every student at every school. While this may be true in some cases, it is nowhere near true in all. Therapeutic boarding schools exist, but neither of the schools represented in these films are one. However, the media sees sex-crazed teenagers as the more exciting part of all-girls school. As girls are growing up, they are experiencing new things. Sex,

it seems, sells. Though my personal experience with this topic is surely biased, I expected to find more similarities between my experiences and the experiences that the media portrays.

There are a multitude of other films, TV shows, and literature that take place at single-sex high schools or colleges, but they all exist for different reasons. However, only the most serious of them will focus on events that take place in the classroom. *Never Let Me Go* by Kazuro Ishiguro, for example, is about a boarding school where the students are secretly raised to be organ donors. The education is focused on learning how to take care of your bodies although it ultimately ends in death for the characters. *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë, although the entire setting is not at a boarding school, includes a boarding school education for Jane. Still, these experiences are not what I expected from media that mirrors the experiences I had at the Grier School for Girls or in my college education.

My expectations have not been met because private boarding schools and single-sex colleges are depicted for the middle classes who may not ever get the chance to experience them. Therefore, producers, directors, and authors do not need to worry about accuracy because the majority of the viewers will not know how wrong the portrayed experiences are. Everyone knows what school is like. Viewers care about the school experience, not the academics. *Dead Poets Society* and *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* have classroom scenes because the teacher is exciting. *The Group* does not focus on classes or the college experience because the readership cares about the women's life and their circumstances post-college. Just as education has served a multitude of purposes for the characters involved in the fictional schools analyzed, the media serves the viewer or reader to grasp at what they are missing. There is a point to education, but it changes based on the goals of the women, other peers or adults who may influence her life, her socioeconomic status, the time she is living in, and her personal goals. Though there are negative

representations of schools, I do not believe that any of my analyzed works suggest that education is pointless. Afforded the right opportunities and appropriate mindset to overcome, say, a dictatorial teacher or strict societal expectations, women, both real and fictionalized, will find significance in being educated.

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